

Sunday School

PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY.

Antioch to Philippi.

Acts 16: 6-15.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Come over into Macedonia, and help us."—Acts 16: 9.

DAILY HOME READINGS.

M.—Acts 15: 36-41.

T.—Acts 16: 1-15.

W.—2 Cor. 2: 12-17.

Th.—Phil. 1: 1-11.

F.—Phil. 2: 12-23.

S.—Isaiah 65: 17-66, 2.

S.—John 10: 9-16.

SHORTER CATECHISM.

Q. 62. What are the reasons annexed to the Fourth Commandment?

A. The reasons annexed to the Fourth Commandment are: God's allowing us six days of the week for our own employment. His challenging a special propriety in the Seventh. His own example, and His blessing the Sabbath day.

LESSON COMMENTS.

Let every Sunday school class at this stage read the second chapter of Galatians, from verse 1 to 16. It contains much information about Paul's conduct between the time of the council at Jerusalem and his second missionary tour.

1. What events transpire between the council and Paul's second tour? Explain the conduct of Peter, or Barnabas and of Paul.

2. Trace the route of Paul's travels in this second tour.

3. Why did Paul refuse to circumcise Titus, and then of his own motion circumcise Timothy?

4. How did the Lord give direction to the steps of Paul and Silas?

I. History.

At Jerusalem during the council, Paul had many conferences with the other Apostles, and through those conversations, was confirmed in his assurance, (Gal. 2: 6) of the correctness of his preaching. He had a talk, too, with John—the last notice of the beloved Apostle, until his exile to Patmos. At that time some of the brethren insisted that Titus, (who had gone with Paul from Antioch,) should be circumcised; to this, Paul, recognizing the fact that the act of circumcision involved the observance of all the Jewish ceremonies, would by no means consent. After the council, Judas and Silas accompanied Paul back to Antioch, in order to explain the action of the council about the necessity of circumcision, and to secure cordial acquiescence in it by all parties. Judas soon returned to Jerusalem, but Silas remained at Antioch, and Paul also continued there for some time, probably making short visits to Tarsus or other adjacent parts.

After a while Peter came down to Antioch. At first he sat down at table with Gentile Christians and ate with them. This was contrary to Jewish customs, because of the risk incurred by touching vessels that were ceremonially unclean, or of eating food cooked with the fat of beef or mutton, or of breaking other ceremonial regulations. Peter did this with a clear conscience, for God had taught him (Acts 10: 35) that in every nation (Jew or Gentile) he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted with Him. But when certain converted Pharisees came down from Jerusalem, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. This vacillation was just like Peter. He was bold and brave at times when it cost him something to be bold; vacillating at times when he was off his guard. Bold enough to draw his sword in the face of the soldiers at Gethsemane, and yet denying his Master under the questionings of a maid-servant. Bold in baptizing Cornelius, and in defending his course, brave in defending the truth in the Council, and yet afraid of a Pharisee at Antioch. While Paul blamed him for yielding to what was (probably) his natural timidity, let us honor the man who so overcame that natural timidity at such a time as the great Council, and stood so nobly for the right, at the risk of losing his influence at Jerusalem.

But with Barnabas things were not working so smoothly. He had been sent by the Church at Jerusalem to Antioch. (Acts 11: 22.) He seems to have occupied at first a specially prominent place, exercising great influence over the missionary operations there. He had called on Saul of Tarsus as his assistant. Now Paul indirectly rebukes Barnabas, along

with Peter. It were but human nature for him to feel it keenly. Possibly there was another cause of difference between them. The expression in Acts 15: 36, "After some days Paul said to Barnabas," enforced by a participle (in the Greek), which gives to the next clause the idea of "Let us go now at last and visit our brethren," leaves a suspicion that Barnabas was not as eager to venture again into Pisidia as was Paul. Then the debate about John Mark ripened the differences into strife. God made the wrath of man to praise Him, for as a result of this strife, two bands of missionaries went forth instead of one. Barnabas and Mark took the countries along the sea. Paul and Silas started for Pisidia.

II. Paul's Route of Travel.

The peninsula of Asia Minor was at that time divided into several provinces whose boundaries were constantly fluctuating. Cilicia lay along the Mediterranean sea, just west of Syria; to the north of it were Lycaonia, Cappadocia and Pontus. Along the sea to the west of Cilicia was Pamphylia, and to the north of it were Pisidia, Phrygia and Bithynia. Galatia lay northeast of Phrygia. To the west of these was the province of Asia, with Mysia as its northern country. (Probably there is a map of this in a family Bible, or in a Bible dictionary in every household; look at it.) Paul and Silas started from Antioch, northwest to Cilicia. There they visited Tarsus and other cities. Thence they went north to the Taurus mountains, and (probably) through the pass known as the Cilician Gates to Lycaonia. The pass is eighty miles in length, and lies between lofty cliffs of rock and is in places so narrow that two chariots could not go abreast. At the end of the pass one road led north to Pontus, the birth-place of Aquila; the left hand road led Paul to Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and we suppose Antioch. From Iconium they went northwest, probably via Laodicea into Phrygia, then northeast to Galatia. Thence they took a west course till they came to a point midway between the provinces of Asia, with Ephesus, Smyrna and Philadelphia on the west, and Bithynia on the northeast. The Spirit forbade them to preach in Asia or to enter into Bithynia. Therefore they hastened through Mysia, (the northern country of Asia,) down to Troas, near the present Constantinople. And there they seemed to be at a pause. But God sent them over into Europe, into Macedonia, the country of Alexander the Great, lying between what is now Turkey in Europe, and Greece. Three centuries before Alexander had marched into Asia to conquer it by arms; now Paul is sent to conquer the country of Asia, and bring it into subjection to Christ, by Spiritual weapons. The influence of Alexander's victories lasted a few centuries; the influence of Paul's work is felt now after the lapse of nearly two thousand years.

III. Christian Prudence.

Paul refused to circumcise Titus; then turned and circumcised Timothy. Why? In the case of Titus it was a question of yielding to the demands of formalism as against the freedom and liberty of the Gospel. In the case of Timothy there was no such yielding, for the next verse says that Paul gave the churches copies of the decision of the Council. But he saw in Timothy a valuable helper; it was his design in every city to preach to the Jews first, and to meet with them in their synagogues. In order to the success of this plan it was prudent that his companion in travel, should not, (by non-conformity,) needlessly arouse the prejudices of the very people whom he wanted to win. It was a wise use of the prudence which belongs to every Christian worker, and a good example for us all.

IV. Providential Directions.

When the Lord has a special work for any man to do, he is likely to point out the work by his providence. Either he opens, or he closes doors in our faces till we have but one course before us. All of us can think of times when God has thus dealt with us. This is beautifully illustrated in Paul's life. God led him, by his zeal against the Christians, to Damascus, to the spot where Jesus should appear to him, and where Ananias should preach to him. God made use of human violence to drive him from Damascus, and of human threats (along with Divine directions) to keep him from locating in Jerusalem. God sent Barnabas to call him to Antioch, then by prophecy sent him on his first missionary journey. How he was called from that we know not, but it was just in season to attend the Council at Jerusalem. Then the differences with Barnabas directed his course to the inland parts of Asia Minor; the Spirit suffered him not to enter into Bithynia, nor to stop to preach in Asia, because there was need of haste in carrying the Gospel to the great centres of Greek literature, Philippi, Athens and Corinth. Thus does God choose all our changes for us. In hours of disappointment, let us trust Him that all is right.